

Lucas D. Grimm

Foundations of College Writing—Dr. Sherry

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Low Physical Activity Levels Among College Students

Problem

Physical exercise is a very important if one is to live a happy, healthy lifestyle. Physical exercise comes in many forms; whether it be playing sports, lifting weights, running, etc.

Whichever form one chooses to partake in, it is something that they should perform regularly, especially as they get older. So if physical exercise is so important, especially in our later years, why do students exercise less in college than they did in high school? Do we lose interest? Are we too busy?

In this paper I will address these questions I have laid out, with the main point of interest being how physical exercise decreases as students move from high school to college. I

will use my own data, along with the data I have collected from these three sources: K.A Kings

(2014) *Vigorous Physical Activity Among College Students: Using The Health Belief Model To*

Assess Involvement and Social Support, Jeffrey S. Pauline's (2013) *Physical Activity Behaviors,*

Motivation and Self-Efficacy Among College Students, and Brittney Hawkins's, Jacqui L. Kalin's

and Jennifer J. Waldron's (2014) *Psychological Needs Profile, Motivational Orientation, And*

Physical Activity Of College Students. This data will help me to draw conclusions about why

college students are getting less exercise and what it means to be a college student and a student

at Bloomsburg University.

Background

In the Archives of Exercise in Health & Disease, K.A. King (2014) did a study on physical exercise levels among college students and how they compare to the exercise levels of the same students when they were in high school¹ (p. 270). He looked at factors that seem to be affecting how much physical exercise students are getting and what this means for their health. Of the 480 students surveyed, 71% said that they were a member of a sports team in high school, while only 6.7% reported that they are currently a member of a college or university team, (p. 270). To me, this shows that a large reason for the lack of exercise among college students is due to the lack of participation in sports at college. From the interviews I have conducted, I have found that a reason for this decrease in sport participation upon reaching college is partially due to a lack of self-motivation.

In addition, K.A. King (2014) found that of the students he studied, 59% reported that they did not have the motivation to exercise (p. 271). What I have found interesting however, is that many of the students had reported that they had a friend or parent/guardian who either encouraged them to participate in some form of exercise, or who exercised themselves (p. 270)². This caused me to ask a few questions and look deeper into the meaning and reasoning behind this “lack of self-motivation”³. Some final important data collected by King was that two of the main barriers between college students and physical exercise were school workload (84.8%) and a job (55%) (p. 271). Is the college workload that much greater than the high school workload that students are unable to exercise and manage their health? Do more students have a job in college that didn’t have a job in high school? And what is the true meaning and reasoning behind this idea of students lacking self-motivation?

¹ INtroduce

² INsert

³ INterpret

In a different study, Jeffrey S. Pauline (2013) found data that went hand in hand with that of K.A King. Pauline found that participation in physical activity statistics show that there is a substantial decline in physical activity levels among 18-24 year old individuals and that physical activity levels are higher amongst high school students than they are amongst college students (p. 65). Pauline points out that 35% to 42% of college students do not get the recommended amount of physical activity (p. 65). Some of the reasons for this decline are similar to the reasons that K.A King pointed out in his research. These reasons included students' academic workload, lack of sport participation, and lack of self-confidence (Pauline, 2013, p. 65-66). The statement "social cognitive theory and related physical activity research identifies the critical role of self-efficacy beliefs in guiding the self-regulation of behavior, including behaviors involved with physical activity initiation and maintenance," shows how once again, self-confidence, mainly the lack of, is very crucial towards levels of activity and physical exercise (p. 65). This means that something is causing students to lose motivation to work out. Perhaps it is due to the increased workload or perhaps they no longer have family members and peers pushing them to participate in sports and exercise.

In their study, Hawkins, Kalin and Waldron (2014) point out that the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services has found that 80% of children and adults do not meet the required levels of exercise (p. 138). "Studying young adults, aged 18 to 24, the researchers found that intrinsic motivation, integrated regulations, and interjected regulations were positively associated with PA levels and that external regulations were negatively associated with PA levels," (p. 140). This is basically saying that physical activity levels are greatly influenced by different forms of motivation, which is data I have observed in my own, and others' research.

Method

After observing this data, I was left with many questions. To answer these questions I obtained some data of my own through ethnographic methods. I conducted interviews with students and questioned them on their exercise levels and how they have changed from high school to college. I knew that a great way to obtain information about levels of physical activity among college students would be to ask college students themselves. I asked them what they think the reasoning is for the change in physical exercise levels in their lives now that they are in college. I asked them questions like “Do you play as many sports in college as you did in high school?” and “do you exercise less in college than you did in high school?” By asking college students these questions, along with others, I was able to obtain some very important and useful data.

Findings

From the interviews I have conducted, I have discovered some very important answers to some very important questions⁴. What I found was that many of the students I talked to were embarrassed to start lifting weights because they wouldn’t be able to lift as much as those around them, or felt uncomfortable because they didn’t know any exercises they could do⁵. In my opinion, this lack of self-motivation could be interpreted as a lack of knowledge or lack of confidence⁶.

I found that a reason for this decrease in sport participation upon reaching college is partially due to a lack of motivation, lack of free time, and a large school workload. Of the

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people I interviewed, the majority of them reported that while in high school, they had family or peers or both, that motivated them to participate in sports and to exercise. They also stated that now that they are in college, they no longer have that outside motivation encouraging them to exercise. This could possibly mean that now that we are older, our parents can expect us to exercise without them having to tell us to. In addition, a few of the students stated that the only reason they played sports was because their parents wanted them too. That means that this lack of sports participation in college is not only due to students not having enough free time or having a large school workload, but can be due to a lack of desire and self-motivation as well. This seems to be a large trend among college students and a crucial factor behind the problem of students getting less physical exercise now that they are in college than they did in high school.

Another one of my findings that I found very important was that many students in both my interview and the studies done by K. A King (2014) was that many students reported that they did not have enough free time and that they had too much schoolwork (p. 271). King found that 84.8% of the students he surveyed reported that their school workload was one of the reasons they do not exercise on a normal basis. It has always been common knowledge that academics at a college/university level is much more challenging than that at the high school level. This is a very positive thing and something that is very important for students who want to successfully further their education. Also, I have begun to realize that these academic challenges can also have a negative impact on the student, one of those main impacts being that it is inhibiting students from getting healthy amounts of exercise. However, I feel that in some instances it may not be the amount of work that the student has, but their ability to manage and use their time wisely. Many students, me included, tend to procrastinate and put things off until the last minute. If these students were better able to manage their time in accordance with their

workload, they would find themselves having a greater amount of free time and more opportunities to lift weights, play sports, run, etc. All of this data allowed me to better understand why students are not getting as much exercise as they did in high school.

Conclusion

After looking at my data and the data of others, I am now better able to understand physical exercise levels among college students versus those of high school students. It is clear to me that college students are getting less exercise than when they were attending high school. The data that I found went hand-in-hand with the findings of K.A King (2014), Jeffrey S. Pauline (2013) and Brittney Hawkins, et al. (2014). Like them, I found that the main reasons for college students not getting enough exercise include a large academic workload, lack of motivation, and the decrease in sports participation. I feel that if students were to better manage their and were able to find tools to keep them motivated, there would not be such a decline in exercise levels as students transition from high school to college. I affirm the findings of these researchers and know that college students are getting less physical exercise than those in high school due to a lack in both personal and parental motivation.

Works Cited

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